

PLAYING AS THE WORLD FALLS APART: THE ROLE OF COMMERCIAL VIDEO-GAMES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown deeply impacted on collective life, yielding a distress situation. Gaming technologies proved to be useful during stressful life experiences, however there is a limited number of studies on commercial games in crisis contexts - compared to serious games. In this research we had a twofold objective, which was to explore if and how gaming practices changed during the lockdown and their possible role on people's lives during the pandemic. To this aim, we conducted an online survey involving 330 video game players who were living in Italy during the first lockdown and analysed the results qualitatively. Data showed that the pandemic modified the players' sense of space and time, transformed their social relations, and provoked negative emotions. The participants, however, used video games to compensate their thwarted needs, even though a variety of unexpected effects occurred. On the basis of the survey findings, we identify four different ways to escape from reality by using video games during moments of crisis. Moreover, we suggest some guidelines to improve the design of technologies for crises.